

Chapman University

Chapman University Digital Commons

Film and Media Arts Faculty Articles and
Research

Dodge College of Film and Media Arts

6-2020

Empty Time as Traumatic Duration: Towards a Cinematic *Aevum*

Kelli Fuery

Chapman University, kfuery@chapman.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/film_articles



Part of the [Other Film and Media Studies Commons](#), [Other Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Philosophy of Mind Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Fuery, K. (2020). Empty time as traumatic duration: Towards a cinematic *aevum*. *Film-Philosophy*, 24(2): 204-221. <https://doi.org/10.3366/film.2020.0139>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Dodge College of Film and Media Arts at Chapman University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Film and Media Arts Faculty Articles and Research by an authorized administrator of Chapman University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact laughtin@chapman.edu.

Empty Time as Traumatic Duration: Towards a Cinematic *Aevum*

Comments

This article was originally published in *Film-Philosophy*, volume 24, issue 2, in 2020. a href="https://doi.org/10.3366/film.2020.0139">https://doi.org/10.3366/film.2020.0139

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/)

Copyright

The author

Empty Time as Traumatic Duration: Towards a Cinematic *Aevum*

Kelli Fuery, Chapman University

Abstract:

Frank Kermode uses the term *aevum* to question the links between origin, order, and time, associating experience with spatial form. Without end or beginning, *aevum* identifies an intersubjective order of time where we participate in the “relation between the fictions by which we order our world and the increasing complexity of what we take to be the ‘real’ history of that world”; being “in-between” time is a primary quality of the *aevum*. Regarding cinema, *aevum* identifies this third duration as emotional experience, occurring as traumatic time. It facilitates thinking beyond lived temporal experience of everyday life to a philosophy of experience that accounts for alternative sensoria of time, similar to the traumatic encounter. The cinematic *aevum* is equally not of the material, corporeal world; concurrently associating human reality with the myths of the human condition. To say that a cinematic *aevum* exists following traumatic scenes, is to specify a visual “time-fiction” in film, to recognise a spatial form that belongs neither to the finite time of the film’s narrative, or of the “eternal” time outside the film’s diegesis, but participates in the order (and linking) of both. Wilfred Bion’s psychoanalytic works are used to discuss the traumatic symptom of “empty time”: the inability to recollect, to make links between memory and experience, demonstrating a version of empty time that works as an external violence to spectator perception. Bion’s theories offer fresh psychoanalytic perspective on trauma and its relationship to time by challenging classical ways of thinking about inner and outer perception.

Keywords: *Aevum*; Frank Kermode; Wilfred Bion; emotional experience; time; trauma; cinema.

Film-Philosophy 24.2 (2020): 204–221

DOI: 10.3366/film.2020.0139

© Kelli Fuery. This article is published as Open Access under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial Licence (<http://www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>) which permits non-commercial use, distribution and reproduction provided the original work is cited. For commercial re-use, please refer to our website at: www.euppublishing.com/customer-services/authors/permissions.
www.euppublishing.com/film

The usual response to traumatic events is to avoid thinking about them, “to banish them from consciousness” (Herman, 1992/2015, p. 1) and yet when one reviews the history of cinema – popular, global, and independent alike – the number of films that integrate traumatic experience as a plot device or aesthetic rationale show it as being overwhelmingly present. Instead of avoidance, cinema exercises a capacity to effect traumatic attraction. Trauma, as disruptive, persistent, and affective experience that occurs within the duration of our lives, finds containment (if ephemeral) in cinema via displacement. As Judith Herman (1992/2015) writes, the drive to avoid thinking about traumatic experience is equalled by the certainty that it cannot be avoided, “murder will out. Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims” (p. 1). Herman is, of course, speaking about real life experience, yet this desire to restore a harmonious balance and move toward healing also structures cinematic narrative. The relationship between cinema and trauma has been, and continues to be, examined in terms of affective and emotional experience for audiences (Ambrosi -Garcia, 2016; Caruth, 1996; Fuery, 2018), and in terms of impact regarding innovation in cinematic technological development (Doane, 2002; Mulvey, 2006). Later in the article, I consider the proliferation of cinema’s technological development as an indicator of our changing relationships with time and indicative of our evolving capacities to use time creatively. In altering the order and structure of time via new screen-fictions, we modify our orientation and experiences with time and the ways in which stories of trauma are told; but told they are, and the need to express these stories remains despite their varied presentations.

Rather than focus on prescriptive examples and representations of trauma within cinema, I am interested in the underlying motivations that propel audiences’ repeated return to difficult and distressing stories, especially if such considerable psychic energy is spent avoiding our own. Trauma, in real life, often leaves us feeling numb or unable to recall in detail the corresponding event, and I associate the aesthetic, affective, and embodied impact resultant from trauma with contemporary psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion’s *Attacks on Linking* (1959/1967a) and *A Theory of Thinking* (1962/1967b). Bion’s theories are discussed in detail later, but here briefly, an “attack on linking” refers to the destruction of the ability to make connections between sensory lived experience and the thinking or processing of such experience. Simply put, Bion’s psychoanalytic model speaks to an embodied sense of feeling disconnected from parts of yourself, from the world around you, unable to think

positively or to make good associations within the duration of life. It helps to articulate what trauma does to our inner world, attacking the ability to make connections between our past, present, and future in emotionally expansive ways. Cinematic trauma, as a variable term, simultaneously refers to film fictions that contain traumatic narratives and visual effects, and to the potential and actual trauma that may occur during cinematic experience. It is not possible to outline a universal definition when it comes to traumatic experience, particularly with respect to cinema. Some examples of cinematic trauma may excite viewers, resulting in detailed recall, but injure others, engendering repression or avoidance.

Frank Kermode's seminal study of time-fictions, *The Sense of an Ending* (1966/2000), offers a specific exploration regarding fictions about the End with respect to the investment and recurrent interest in stories of apocalypse, and the turbulence within sensory life. He begins his treatise with the reflexive observation that the task of the critic lies in "making sense of the ways we try to make sense of our lives" (1966/2000, p. 3). By examining fictions about the End, Kermode considered the need for fictions as a way of filling our time "between the *tick* and *tock*" (p. 63), that is, the interval of human life. Kermode questioned the way in which literary fictions about apocalypses play out the existential tensions we imagine about the end of the world. It was precisely within these fictions (their repetition and recurrence) where he saw humanity's attempt to determine their belonging and sense of importance in a world that often appears indifferent. The primary form of attention involved in this sense-making activity is our experience of and with time, more specifically our experience with such time-fictions. In attending to our perspectives and uses of time-fictions, we satisfy our need to know the "shape of life" (p. 3), experiences of and with time, forming a sensibility of time-consciousness.

On these terms, Kermode's interest in time-fictions as a means to make sense of the ways in which we make sense of human life connects well with Bionian psychoanalysis. Both authors interrogate the emotional experience associated with apocalypse (or trauma) as a need to know, that is, to think and feel lived experience. In *Learning from Experience* (1962), Bion, following Melanie Klein (1975), established a rigorous study of unconscious emotional experience. Despite significant scholarship on the intersections between trauma and cinema, and recent growth in references to Bion in film and media studies (Ambrosi -Garcia, 2016; Fuery, 2018), discussion of his ideas on the subject of trauma still relies on the hermeneutics of clinical application. Bion's (1959/1967a) work on "the destructive attack in the production" of thought (p. 93), for example,

examines how our associations within lived emotional experience come under threat. His theory of thinking is a model that helps to consider how certain durations of time might work as containment with cinema, as intervals which support the potential processing of turbulent emotional experience, facilitating the ability to link thoughts that would otherwise be lost, denied or negated due to traumatic events. Containment, in the Bionian sense, refers to psychical and corporeal processes which link “emotion to thought, sensory data to felt experience” (Fuery, 2018, p. 171). This offers a divergent way of thinking about the function of time in relation to trauma in cinema, how it affects one’s capacity to make associations with time and how, in turn, this impacts the thinking of emotional experience. Bion’s writings help to account for the affect of crisis time-fictions as sensory experience of intervals within everyday life, providing an underexplored psychoanalytic perspective on trauma in cinema and its relationship to time by challenging classical ways of thinking about inner and outer perception.

While Kermode distinguishes between specific literary fictions and a meta-theory of fiction, his interpretation of *aevum* with respect to our relationship to time and fiction remains valuable. In the twentieth and twenty-first century, the use of literature as an object and structure finds new parallels via screen objects and structures, where the prevalence of crisis-fictions has neither waned or discontinued. Where literature was once a new parallel for crisis-fictions in painting, now screen media proliferate new crisis-fictions in response to rising ambiguity in uncertain times. It seems that the more unsure humanity feels about its future, its belonging and knowing of the world and each other, the more in need it is of crisis-fictions to think through the subsequent unrest. Kermode (1966/2000) refers to this enduring and repetitive tradition as a “need for concord-fictions” manifested via “the modern apocalypse” (p. 63), noting that while fictions themselves may transition in response to socio-political and historical events, it is the belief in crisis, or a perpetual preoccupation with the End that remains “immanent rather than imminent” (p. 101). These apocalypses, or crises, as expressions of trauma work as considerations of our relationships with time as modalities or orientations to what I argue is “empty time as traumatic duration” within cinematic experience. In cinema, worlds are given and destroyed regularly, encapsulating imagined pasts and predicted futures, equal projections which demonstrate the unconscious activity of splitting parts of ourselves onto/into the materialities of our external world. Apocalypses are performed and designed *ad infinitum* as trauma time-fictions, they creatively contain multiple intervals of *tick-tock* to make sense of our lives.

Film scholar Janet Walker (2005) has written on the impact of recurrent global conflict in documentaries and television programs dealing with incest, focusing specifically on the consequential relationships between trauma and memory – what we might see as an example of Kermode's enduring modern apocalypses. Her study on the legacy of trauma cinema looks closely at the links between memory, trauma, and representation to examine the “social consequence of this heritage of catastrophe” (p. xv). Walker's close textual analyses of documentary and incest narratives offer informative statements on the connections between myths of history and the indeterminacy of trauma and memory; however, while valuable, this is not the approach that I follow here. As Susannah Radstone (2007) has noted, a key intention, perhaps driving principle of the much broader field of trauma theory is to address states of suspension, in-between, and the referential: “trauma theory suggests that the relation between representation and ‘actuality’ might be reconceived as one constituted by the absence of traces” (p. 12). Radstone's work on trauma is instructive to my theorisation of “empty time as traumatic duration” as she rigorously questions the relationship between trauma and representation, moving beyond classical applications of psycho-analytic theory and acknowledging the limits of text and language. She intimates the affective centrality of trauma in life by highlighting external experience, asking “is it that theories of trauma are taken to illuminate the relation between actuality and representation in general, or is it that actuality is beginning to be taken as traumatic in and of itself?” (p. 13). Here, it is the engagement with the actuality of trauma and its relational qualities over textual representation, which recognises not specifically trauma, but rather time-fiction as a theoretical field. Trauma theory has stood in-between epistemes, existing primarily as an embodied, if fractured, time-consciousness. Kermode views the interest in apocalyptic narratives as a focus of in-betweenness that is indicative of the “middest”. This notion of middest as interval, of interstitial being, is positioned here to attend to the experience of cinematic time as offering a traumatic duration that follows a presentation of crisis, most specifically as a crisis-fiction.

Kermode (1966/2000) writes that it is during the middest – our life span as humans before death and after birth – where our need for “fictive concords” (p. 7), those stories tethered to beginnings and ends, help us order and work through our anxieties and hopes. Such stories of Ends, apocalypses, and crises as traumatic time-fictions, however they are imagined, are “models of the world” (p. 4), which help us to make sense of the ways in which we make sense of the world. Our attention is what saves us, gives us hope, and establishes our meaningfulness and relation

to others and ourselves, and as such we must study time fictions so that they are not relegated into oblivion. Kermode's study of time-fictions as models for us to negotiate and think through our existential and ontological states also examines the concord, or linking, between belonging and knowing, for "to speak humanly of becoming and knowing is the task of pure being" (p. 3), implicitly connecting with two key principles that underwrite Bion's (1962/1967b) theory of thinking. I align Kermode's use of knowing here with Bion's treatment of knowing as a proto-mental state, where thinking and knowing form emotional experience as concurrent embodied and embedded being. For now I wish to note that, in addition to an awareness of time and its chronicity, how we belong to time was important for Kermode, specifically our relation to time(s), our knowing it as "a need in the moment of existence to belong, to be related to a beginning and to an end" (p. 4), with the emphasis shifting away from examining representation and moving toward an attention of sensory relation.

The aim is to place Kermode's theory of *aevum* and time-fiction in conversation with Bion's conceptualisation of linking, particularly in response to the recurrence of crisis time-fictions, and to situate cinema (as varied and variable as that term and apparatus continues to be) as a medium-transition that continues types of crisis-fictions. The source of fictions of the End are extended here as changing configurations of screen media within culture. This has the advantage of continuing Kermode's project, who claims that it was not only our filling the interval of human life with "varied concord-fictions" (p. 63) that was significant, but also our need to continue to feel concord through such fictions. Therefore, the application of Kermode's analysis of time-fiction is directed away from its original literary emphasis to a cinematic one. This is not a transposition of theory but rather a questioning of how our engagement with time-fictions might work with moving-images, despite also referencing cinematic time with respect to film characters and audience spectatorship. Three films are discussed here to typify a formal aesthetic specific to potential audience emotional experience with time, illustrating what is meant by "empty time as traumatic duration." Each film exemplifies a sensory time-consciousness and being-with-time that occurs as a result from trauma in the diegesis, or because it offers audiences time to sit with traumatic events that have occurred. *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976), and *The Headless Woman* (*La mujer sin cabeza*, Lucrecia Martel, 2008) explicate the varied formal creativity in fictive expressions of Ends, as well as their recurrence over time and across cultures. They are not meant as synecdoches or exhaustive examples and as such, they represent the intersubjective aesthetics of time-fictions that

exist and are possible in cinema, which change in type over time but remain nonetheless.

The Significance of the Interval

Kermode (1966/2000) regards fictions of the End functioning both as type and source (p. 6), citing the Bible as offering a particularly regulatory fiction regarding humanity's sense of belonging. If, as Kermode suggests, the Bible is an UR-source of apocalypse time-fiction, then as a type it presents the significance of the in-between of time – a meaningful interval between the beginning *tick* and the end *tock*, as “we can perceive a duration only when it is organized” (p. 45). Kermode's analogy of *tick-tock* is to make us focus on the interval between the start of the *tick* and the end of the *tock*, to realise the time-consciousness of the interval as the structuring device for making meaning of the midst. This founding structure of interval as interstitial time enables Kermode to theorise further its complexity and plurality, claiming that the in-between of the *tick-tock* needs complex fictions to prevent meaninglessness, “to defeat the tendency of the interval between *tick* and *tock* to empty itself [...] the interval must be purged of simple chronicity, of the emptiness of *tock-tick*, humanly uninteresting successiveness” (p. 46). This is the threat of trauma, it will hollow out the interval, reversing the *tick-tock* to *tock-tick*, thereby destroying the possibility of any linking within the experience of time and of life.

The term “empty time” as argued here does not refer to the interval's tendency to empty itself of meaning. In cinema, empty time, as a formal temporal duration following traumatic scenes, works precisely against such purging. “Empty time” foregrounds the affective aesthetic impact of trauma in film, recognising primarily a stylistic practice that occurs after scenes of trauma in film. Slow tracking/panning shots that effect static moments illuminate “empty time as traumatic duration,” creating a cinematic *aevum* where attention is arrested through the avoidance of cuts and prevalence for lengthier shots. This constructs an in-between time for both the character and the audience, linking trauma with its afterwardness – *Nachträglichkeit* – Sigmund Freud's (1895/1975) term for delayed action where memory is an experience of a memory of the trauma rather than trauma itself. Empty time allows spectators to experience the film within a duration that is not solely concerned with furthering the film's story. Concurrent with the time and emotional experience of the character, it invites the audience into a parallel, containing relationship with cinematic time, making sense of the trauma that has occurred. Throughout Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*, the interval structures the different types of trauma permitting the audience to think

through the moral complexities they expose. In addition to its ultra-violence (e.g., use of blood squibs, loud sounds, and blood splatter), *Taxi Driver* presents further trauma through moral violence by continuously positioning Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) as both hero and villain.

After Bickle shoots Sport (Harvey Keitel) on the steps of a New York brownstone, he walks away a little, resting for a moment on a nearby stoop. The camera follows, waiting with him as he appears to think over his next move. Sport pimps child prostitutes and his murder is unlikely to present significant moral difficulty for the audience. We stay with Bickle on the steps, a brief interval offered as pause, foreshadowing the longer, more prominent interval that follows inside the building after he has murdered Sport and two other men. Bickle unsuccessfully tries to shoot himself (he runs out of bullets) and sits down on a sofa. The second interval occurs via a bird's eye shot tracking over Iris's (Jodie Foster) room with a loud score incorporating trumpets, snare drum, and harp arpeggio. The tracking shot shows two motionless police officers, their frozen stance establishing a different duration and relation to time for the audience. On recognising the officers' lack of motion, the spectator is invited to engage with a different time-fiction with the film. The continuous shot moves down the stairs, reflecting on the brutal murders, linking the internal reality of the trauma with the external reality of the public and police who are waiting outside on the street.

This sequence demonstrates the aesthetic tendency to portray traumatic events through a series of temporal fragments, illustrating the various structures of crises which bear the weight of the anxieties of the film's characters. Iris has suffered at the hands of men and is confronted with the cognitive dissonance of Bickle's heroism and brutal murders. As the film develops, the audience encounters the paradox of Bickle's vigilantism, his concern for Iris and misplaced righteousness. Here, the intervals of time act as intercessors to the violence, offering an ordering of time similar to what Laura Mulvey (2006) has referred to as "delayed cinema." For Mulvey, this delay explicitly notes the shift in flow of cinematic time; put simply, it slows down, breaking narrative continuity. In the example of *Taxi Driver*, time also shifts perspective – moving from eye-level to a topographical point of view. This slowing down of time incites a further disruption wherein "some detail has lain dormant [...] waiting to be noticed" (Mulvey, 2006, p. 8), indicating a parallel with the Freudian *Nachträglichkeit*. The interval, or delay, is an interruption to the flow of cinematic time, permitting the spectator to shift into a pensive frame of mind. The interval incites a stillness for "the pensive spectator with the process of delaying cinema, capturing the moment of mutation in the act and the reflecting on the representation of time" (2006, p. 189).

The fictive end of this interval (Kermode's *tock*) is signaled by the camera pan moving out onto the street scene, and subsequently orders the unit of this time-fiction.

However, there is a critical difference between the pensive spectator's relationship to time and what is being established here as empty time. Mulvey models her pensive spectator upon Raymond Bellour's conceptualisation by incorporating sensibilities of anticipation and "thoughtful reflection" (Mulvey, 2006, p. 195). In such cases, the delayed aesthetics of the cinematic interval direct what is to be thought about, its materiality informing the topic or theme on which we are to ruminate. While there are certainly some similarities here, my conceptualisation of empty time resists contemplative or meditative thought. In *Taxi Driver*, empty time is defined by the moral ambiguity, and perhaps even the amorality, of both Bickle's character and actions. This time-fiction within the film enables the spectator to form a secondary or parallel relationship which goes beyond a direct thinking about what has just taken place. In response to the traumatic events, the spectator is left adrift in making moral judgements about such characters with the disruptive interval remaining constitutive of, and attached to, the traumatic experience itself.

Kermode's foregrounded interest in apocalypse and crisis-fictions as a means to make sense of the world proposes a durational paradox. On the surface, to be interested and find satisfaction in traumatic stories suggests a (psychosomatic) masochism, an economic problem (Freud 1924/2007). Freud argued that we are driven to seek pleasure (or satisfaction) and avoid unpleasure, and on this basis it would seem that enjoying stories of the End would dispute this model. Yet for Kermode (1966/2000), "crisis, however facile the conception, is inescapably a central element in our endeavors toward making sense of our world" (p. 94) and while this shares some elements with the Freudian model of the mind, Bion's theory of thinking presents an alternative interpretative position. Bion (1962/1967b) believed our satisfaction was made possible through a capacity to tolerate and think emotional turbulence, an ability to confront frustration and not avoid it. These turbulent, traumatic crisis-fictions reflect sensoria relevant to Bion's "need to know" and Kermode's need to feel concord. Of the modern apocalypse, Kermode (1966/2000) writes, "crisis is a way of thinking about one's moment, and not inherent in the moment itself" (p. 101). If it is accepted that crises or apocalypses are different types or expressions of trauma, not unlike the afterwordness of *Nachträglichkeit*, then Kermode's assertion can be likened to Bion's model of mental development, particularly on the basis of time. Bion viewed thinking as something that was contingent on capacity. First comes "the development of thoughts" (1962/1967b, p. 110) which

requires “an apparatus to cope with them” (p. 111), and secondly, only after such an apparatus or capacity is present can thinking be possible, “thinking has to be called into existence to cope with thoughts” (p. 111). I have written on this at length elsewhere (Fuery, 2018) so let us return to the focus on *aevum*, time-fiction, and cinematic experience.

Aevum

Aevum, as an ordering of time, recognises not simply a third category, but a “third duration, between that of time and eternity” (Kermode, 1966/2000, p. 70). Since Thomas Aquinas, *aevum* has continued to address not only an in-between category of duration or existence, it has evolved to speak primarily to our experience of and with time, that is, our affective relation with time. Indeed, the concept of *aevum* was coined to solve a durational paradox, its usefulness extending to reflection on the relationship between durations themselves – eternity (God’s time), *aevum* (in-between, immortal angel time that lacks an end), and humanity (material time that has a beginning and an end, defined by the midst). Kermode’s use of *aevum* highlights its status as a time-fiction to question the links between origin, order, and time and to identify the weight/wait of the interval and the attention it demands. As a word that associates time with experience and spatial form – without end or beginning – *aevum* notes an intersubjective order of time that we participate with in its construction. Kermode (1966/2000) saw it as a “relation between the fictions by which we order our world and the increasing complexity of what we take to be the ‘real’ history of that world” (p. 67). We might say, being “in-between” time is a primary quality of the *aevum*, what supports the concord-fictions between *tick-tock* of human existence and prevents the interval from being devoid of meaning, simply passing time.

Aevum works similarly in the realm of cinema, which is equally not of the material, corporeal world. This interval of cinematic time concurrently links human reality with fictions of the human condition that attempt to make sense of such reality. As an intersubjective, embodied, ordering time-fiction, a cinematic *aevum* draws attention to the happening of time that occurs in-between experiences, well suited to the analyses of emotional experience that go beyond trauma (guilt, for example). Kermode sees the time-fiction of *aevum* as representative of all fictional time – the time we experience when engaged with stories, “not temporal or eternal [...] but participating in both” (p. 72). Used contemporaneously, *aevum* facilitates thinking about experiences of time beyond the time of angels. It is a means of thinking everyday experience, linking beginnings and ends, and thinking a philosophy of lived experience that

we might extend to other kinds of affective time. This incurs a need to develop or consider different articulations of a cinematic *aevum*, recognising varying relationships with time across and between cinemas as well as emotional experiences. Crisis or trauma time-fictions typify one variety of cinematic *aevum*, an arrest of temporal duration to engender a spectator's acute awareness. Cinematic trauma, as a time-fiction, holds a unique (but not sole) perspective on the *aevum*, revealing a relationship with cinematic time that often goes unnoticed.

To note a specific type of cinematic *aevum* that follows traumatic scenes, is to recognise a visual time-fiction as temporal duration in film; to recognise a spatial form that belongs neither to the finite time of the film's narrative (its *tick-tock*), or of the "eternal" time outside the film's diegesis, but participates in the order and linking of both. Kermode (1966/2000) notes that *aevum* is an "awkward word" but sees its potential in identifying other typologies of duration beyond that of angels, widening its reach to include other interstitial durations such as the "time of characters" and also of "ordinary human life" (p. 195), where the experience of real time can be linked (concorded) with the affective sensory experience that occurs within such durations. Here, and within the context of cinema, *aevum* identifies an intersubjective sensory quality specific to the duration of time focused on emotional experience that occurs as "empty time."

A core property of the *aevum*, then, is its capacity to register lived experience as something that "truly exists in another realm of time" (Kermode, 1966/2000, p. 194) – that is, an unconscious, intersubjective time that is co-constructed. *Aevum* is not simply about identifying a third order of time; it further identifies the sensoria involved with experiencing it. Kermode (1966/2000) writes, "such are those moments which Augustine calls the moments of the soul's attentiveness; less grandly, they are moments of what psychologists call 'temporal integration'" (p. 71). He links this to the beginnings of what was to be called "spatial form." The cinematic *aevum* is not an empty time in the sense that it is hollow – rather it is an arrested attentive duration within film that follows traumatic scenes, "[the *aevum*] does not abolish time or spatialize it; it co-exists with time, and is a mode in which things can be perpetual without being eternal" (p. 72).

In the opening of *The Headless Woman*, Verónica (María Onetto) drives away from a family gathering, listening to upbeat music on the radio. Verónica's cell phone rings and she tries to answer it but in doing so takes her eyes off the road and hits something with her car. Our usual expectation might be that the camera cuts to what was hit, but the point of view never leaves the car, remaining static for a full minute in a shallow

focused close-up on Verónica's profile. Our attention is tethered to her wrestling with what has just happened. Verónica continues driving, pulling over a little later to get out of the car. Again, the camera remains in the car, shifting slightly but does not follow Verónica who leaves and stays out of focus. The sequence ends with thunder and rain on the car's windscreen. The static camera creates the interval of cinematic *aevum* here, the sole intention of the empty time as traumatic duration being audience integration with Verónica's inability to be truthful with herself rather than solve the mystery over what she hit. We do not follow her out of the car during the static second *aevum*, instead remaining temporally integrated with her turbulent inner world. It is not just the trauma of the hit-and-run that is at stake, but the larger traumatic tumult already present inside her.

This aesthetic tendency marks the beginning of the spectator's parallel time-fiction with Verónica's unsettled inner world that is sustained throughout the film. In later scenes, we remain with her, despite not knowing what is occurring. We are often left waiting with and around her until she comes to a decision we are not privy to: for example, in the bathroom after her medical check-up, Verónica listens in on other women for around ninety seconds before leaving; or later, in her mother's bedroom, we sit with Verónica as she struggles with her sense of guilt, hallucinating the young boy she believes she killed. As cinematic *aeva*, these moments with Verónica are very much focused on her internal time-consciousness and the turmoil of her inner world, offering the spectator space to link such emotional experiences with their own arrested attention. The cinematic *aevum* exists parallel to the actual duration of the film, arresting the experience of the progression of cinematic time, thereby serving to order the emotional experience of the trauma within filmic sequences. *The Headless Woman* devises its affective force precisely around these empty time moments, foregrounding the emotional time of Verónica's character. As empty time, *aevum* expresses the in-between duration of sensory response, aesthetically attempting to link (process/think) through the empty time of traumatic duration. Kermode writes that "acts without 'success' are a property of the *aevum*" (p. 86), so inasmuch as trauma can be defined by time, equally it has a capacity to fragment and disrupt future time, disturbing the order and emotional experience of life as *tick-tock*. *The Headless Woman* shows different time-fiction of arrested attention via static camera to establish temporal integration via empty time as cinematic *aevum*.

Time is key to the order and structure of reality and meaning, its purpose in cinema directed to the structure of narrative and experience, where most formal elements work to aestheticise time. Mary Ann Doane

(2002) uses the story “The Kinetoscope of Time” as an example of the affective component within the representability of time, contingent on the emergence of new vision technologies. Cinema makes possible a spectator’s affective immersion through the implicit order of image duration, where other spaces and times were offered alongside non-cinematic time and space: “the emerging cinema participated in a more general cultural imperative, the structuring of time and contingency in capitalist modernity” (Doane, 2002, pp. 3–4). Doane points out it was the thinking or attitude toward time that changed with the advent of new cinematic technology at the turn of the century, and in doing so, she inadvertently touches on Kermode’s ideas. Fictions adapt and change in response to the world that creates them, “they change because we no longer live in a world with an historical *tick* which will certainly be consummated by a definitive *tock*” (Kermode, 1966/2000, p. 64). Indeed, Doane (2002) echoes Kermode’s position by foregrounding time as something that was “*felt* – as a weight, as a source of anxiety, and as an acutely pressing problem of representation” (p. 4). By now, we should see this attitude of anxious, sensory experience concerning time reaching beyond specific periods or contexts and highlighting the persistent need for concord-fictions that make sense of our lives. Doane discusses the notion of dead time and I wish to briefly note its similarity to the concept of *aevum* and the association of empty time as traumatic duration discussed here.

Dead time, for Doane (2002), is synonymous with the concept of the event and can be aligned with Kermode’s *aevum* based on interval, as “the event is a deictic marker of time [...] deprived of meaning” (p. 140). Doane also uses Freud’s concept of *Nachträglichkeit* to address the experience of trauma in relationship to time, arguing, “in Freudian psychoanalysis, trauma is the consequence of the nonassimilation of an event that has its psychical impact years later, after the fact” (p. 140). In framing the event as similar to trauma, as something unassimilable, “which resists meaning [...serving as] an assurance of the real” (p. 140), Doane argues that “time itself resists structure,” making the association that cinema itself functions as a traumatic time-fiction within reality. The emergent identity of cinema as an event (disruptive and unassimilable) to everyday life was born bound to time due to its apparatus, similar to Kermode’s literary time-fictions. The film, as event, came to represent the finitude of cinema but concurrently as an interval of time, a cinematic *aevum*, that “remained tinged by the contingent, the unassimilable” (p. 141). Doane’s study on early cinema as temporality and event resonates with Kermode’s study of the fictions of the End as well as Bion’s theory of linking thought and experience, through the nexus of

trauma. These authors' works help to demonstrate how the duration of *aevum* (as interval, as event) offers a vital and polysemic time-consciousness for the spectator.

Bion's approach to trauma differed from Freud's (1920/1955) theorisation of trauma. Where Bion focused on emotional experience as the core of trauma and traumatic memory, Freud (1924/2007) did not account for why returns to unpleasurable experiences were so common, outside the economic problem of masochism and the repression involved with repetition compulsion. Another significant difference within Bion's model is the inclusion of knowledge in the term "emotional experience." In addition to hate and love, knowledge (or knowing) is emotion for Bion (1962): "an emotional experience cannot be conceived of in isolation from a relationship [...] (1) X loves Y; (2) X hates Y; and (3) X knows Y" (pp. 42–43). As a proto-mental state, knowing is an embodied sensory state of being and as emotion, this need-to-know sits at the core of traumatic memory as a still present, still intense affect. From a Bionian perspective, trauma is representative of the inability-to-know. The inability-to-know is a consequence of negligence within maternal preoccupation (alternative examples of the emotional experience of "empty time as traumatic duration"), where the infant is unable to find an adult (usually the mother) who can bear their own unconscious sadistic and hateful feelings (Bion, 1962, pp. 95–99). These unconscious feelings are fragments of the infant's inner world, projected into the adult who is responsible for their care. It is only when the infant has someone who can bear these unbearable and unprocessable feelings (without shame or admonition) that an ability and capacity to think emotional experience can develop. Bion called this process containment and in the event that emotional experience is not able to be contained (beared by the mother or adult responsible for maternal preoccupation), the consequence is an inability-to-know such emotional experience as integrated thought and felt parts of our selves. This lack of integration resulting from non-containment as the inability-to-know, results in thought being dissociated from the thinking of emotional experience. The process of containment is a psychic relational and emotional interval process. Containment is a necessary *aevum* for infancy, an interstitial psychic position that continues throughout adult life as the essential duration we need in order to construct fictions of our selves. I need not state how traumatic this duration can be or how vital it is.

When containment is not possible, these unconfined emotional experiences (traumas) represent an inability-to-know parts of our unconscious true selves. Such unknown fragments are not integrated, remaining as separated, psychotic elements that threaten our present and

future ability to make links and connections between the intuition of sensoria and the conceptualisation of lived experience. Without a capacity for linking, knowing, in a Bionian sense, comes under threat. It was this threat to our need to know that Bion (1959/1967a) saw as most destructive and traumatic, preparing the way for “a severe arrest of development” (p. 107).

Arrested Attention

Empty time as cinematic *aevum* identifies a space of emotional experience within the interpretation of fiction; more specifically, it is a way to consider the experience of time that occurs via one’s engagement with fiction. For Kermode (1966/2000), *aevum* extended to emotional experience incurred in the interval between fictive story worlds and “our sense of real time”, which he termed being “in certain postures of attentiveness” (p. 195). In his *Attacks on Linking* (1959/1967a), Bion exemplifies the fracture in the capacity to contain and associate links across emotional experience through clinical examples of borderline psychosis, but this example only accounts for the significance of a destructive form of attack “on anything which is felt to have the function of linking one object with another” (p. 93). As C. Fred Alford (2018) notes, the failure to link emotional experience through words “is also a consequence of the inability to associate experiences” (p. 47). Alford views trauma as “the rupture of the container” (p. 47) and centres Bion’s attacks on linking as a core model that permits reevaluation of traumatic experience and its consequences. Despite noting that such application is in opposition to how Bion originally viewed attacks on linking, trauma indicates that we have lost an ability to link emotional experiences and, in Bionian terms, this means that containment has been threatened, or at the very least arrested. Cinema, more specifically the cinematic *aevum*, creates the parallel of empty time to facilitate new links that might contain “associations destroyed by trauma” (Alford, 2018, p. 48).

This inability-to-know and link experience is a common presentation of trauma within cinema, noted in the inability to verbally communicate, and in certain disruptive relationships with time – represented as flashforwards/flashbacks to previous unconnected experiences, often thought of as random memories, quite like the moments we spend with Verónica in *The Headless Woman*. Kermode’s concept of *aevum* is observed as working within cinema through the style of an in-between and intersubjective empty time as traumatic duration, discussed in the previous cinematic examples. The cinematic *aevum* reflects the time of the character after traumatic scenes, facilitating an arrested attention in the audience, who responds to the tensions created.

Bion's contribution post Freud and Klein, namely his emphasis on thinking and the inclusion of knowing as emotional, sensory experience and structure, enabled psychoanalytic models to move beyond hate/love as primary states or agencies of desire. Bion saw knowing as central to the establishment of emotional security, which is the laying down of solid foundations for mental growth and functioning. For Bion (1962, pp. 42–44), each emotion (Love / Hate / Knowing) has its negative counterpart (-L, -H, -K). Where Freud's theory of trauma focused on repetition and repression, Bion's approach shows that psychoanalysis can speak to trauma as means to consider the interrelationship of the inner emotional world and the external demands that are placed on it. Cinematically, this occurs in the discord of audio-visual unity, of frozen elements as shards within the *mise-en-scène*, and in the use of disruptive cinematography, a recurrent style that often pertains to the inner world of the character.

In *Psycho*, after Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) has fatally collapsed, half in the bath and half on the bathroom floor, the camera leaves her and follows the water and her blood escaping down the drain hole. The staccato sound has also left, along with the score, and only the sound of the shower running remains. This interval between her life ending, the trauma of her murder and the rest of the film allows a third duration of cinematic time to emerge, creating the capacity to link the trauma and think with the film rather than emptying the experience of meaning. Such formal aspects aesthetically link the time of the film and its characters with audience reception pre and post diegetic trauma. The formal aesthetics of “empty time” as interval or cinematic *aevum* are not intended to be prescriptive, or even specifically in reference to traumatic narratives. Indeed, the aim has been to recognise the practice or stylistic tendency to formally craft a third duration of time that disrupts the actual duration, invoking “arrested attention” in the audience. Time as containment enables a third duration, a different order of time with the film.

Bion's theory of thinking and “attacks on linking” demonstrate how emotional experience within the context of trauma might well involve love and hate, but it is our desire to know that emerges as most significant. The inability-to-know (-K) is the denial of connections that offer meaning, those that make emotional experience fruitful. Bion's, “severe arrest of development” echoes Kermode's *aevum* as an experience he viewed as being “in certain postures of attentiveness.” “Arrested development” and “posture of attentiveness” are observed in the still elements of the three films sequences I have discussed. While not everything is motionless in the sequence, the time of the character has frozen. The events in Iris's bedroom become immobile, despite her own movement, yet the tracking

pan continues; Marion is dead, but the water moves and the pan continues; Verónica has stepped outside her car but we remain with the static frame inside while she walks about, her head just out of shot. Again, not everything is arrested – however the time of the character is caught in this “arrest of development” and the audience is in a “certain posture of attentiveness.”

These examples indicate the various ways *aevum* as a third duration of time occurs within cinema presenting time as containment for audiences to process the traumatic emotion. The cinematography and audiovisual styles used interrupt the actual duration of the film, and in doing so, time itself is affected, specifically the time of the character. This third duration, this cinematic *aevum*, acknowledges there are experiences of time within human life that are inbetween finite time and eternity. The function of linking that is specific to the cinematic *aevum*, and to the capacity to link emotional experience, keeps us in “arrested attention.”

The recognition of “empty time” as a parallel duration in film following scenes of trauma furthered the conceptualisation of a cinematic *aevum*, which functions as an external catalyst and an attempt to part contain the traumatic event, so that the audience can think, or link, their emotional experience. My reason for specifying a cinematic *aevum* is to identify how our experience with the screened, moving-image retains qualities of Kermode’s *aevum* but furthers and diversifies formal attributes of *aevum*’s in-between status that is medium-specific, particularly in terms of affect and time.

Cinema responds in unique ways to the pressures and anxieties of seemingly proximate social crises, as though they were crises of now rather than long histories of experiences concerning repression, oppression, and marginalisation. Bionian psychoanalysis tells us that emotional experience is intersubjective, a causality of external happenings in everyday life negotiated with inner world phenomena. Our relationships with other people are important, insofar as they contain the phenomena felt. Bion’s model places a high level of importance on the inner world over the external world, stating the sensory data we encounter shapes or destroys our inner worlds. It is not just the recurrence in patterns of fictions about the End, or of traumatic-time fictions but the recurrence in creative expressions of different story worlds that contain embedded time-fictions of crises. We can best speak to a cinematic *aevum* and its different presentations in terms of formal aesthetic or narrative patterns. While these forms evolve over time, interest in trauma-time fictions is not discontinued but may be disconfirmed, and it may further eventuate that disconfirmation is essential to the continuity of trauma-time fictions in cinema.

Empty Time as Traumatic Duration

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alford, C. F. (2018). Trauma and psychoanalysis: Freud, Bion, and Mitchell. *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society*, 23(1): 43–54.
- Ambrosi6-Garcia, C. (2016). *Bion in Film Theory and Analysis: The Retreat in Film*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Bion, W. R. (1962). *Learning from Experience*. London: Tavistock.
- Bion, W. R. (1959/1967a). Attacks on Linking. In *Second Thoughts: Selected Papers on Psycho-Analysis* (pp. 93–109). London: William Heinemann Medical Books Ltd.
- Bion, W. R. (1962/1967b). A Theory of Thinking. In *Second Thoughts: Selected Papers on Psycho-Analysis* (pp. 110–119). London: William Heinemann Medical Books Ltd.
- Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Doane, M. (2002). *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive*. Cambridge, MA; London, UK: Harvard University Press.
- Freud, S. (1920/1955). Beyond the Pleasure Principle. In J. Strachey (Ed. & Trans.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII (1920–1922): Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works*, (pp. 1–64). London, UK: The Hogarth Press.
- Freud, S. (1895/1975). Project for a Scientific Psychology. In J. Strachey (Ed. & Trans.), *The Standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud: Vol. I* (pp. 283–397). London, UK: The Hogarth Press.
- Freud, S. (1924/2007). The Economic Problem of Masochism. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIX (1923–1925): The Ego and the Id and Other Works* (pp. 155–170). London, UK: The Hogarth Press.
- Fuery, K. (2018). *Wilfred Bion, Thinking and Emotional Experience with Moving Images*. London; New York: Routledge Publishers.
- Herman, J. (1997). *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic Books.
- Kermode, F. (1966/2000). *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. London; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Klein, M. (1975). *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946–1963*. New York: The Free Press.
- Mulvey, L. (2006). *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Radstone, S. (2007). Trauma Theory: Contexts, Politics, Ethics. *Paragraph*, 30(1): 9–29.
- Walker, J. (2005). *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.